

ARTICLE APPEARED
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WASHINGTON POST
9 August 1983

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Powell Attacks Are Described As Distortions

I have come to the sorrowful conclusion that Jimmy Carter doesn't like me.

Our relationship started off in the clouds, but lost altitude rapidly. There was one bright moment in the White House when he said that I was a careful and conscientious reporter "who always checks his facts."

But sometime before his mournful departure from Washington Carter had a change of heart. He dumped on me three times on national television; little brother Billy assaulted me with barnyard epithets, and their mama, Miss Lillian, wrote me a hate letter.

Now that Jimmy is back among the peanuts, his faithful surrogate, Jody Powell, is carrying on the attacks. He admitted on a radio talk show that he still often speaks for Carter. He has assailed me on a succession of TV talk shows. And lately he has made me the subject of a couple of discomforting columns.

Jody has a gift for straightforward deviousness; he can make semi-facts and half-truths sound plausible and wrap political vilification in a press agent's smile. He does not deny his

role as a political guerrilla fighter. During one confessional, he admitted that he had spread scurrilous falsehoods against Sen. Charles H. Percy (R-Ill.). And the other day he pleaded *nolo* to a history of lies and deceit in behalf of the Carter cause.

For those of us hampered by the inconvenience of reporting facts, Jody's accusatory technique is difficult to cope with. He unlooses grand accusations, stretching the thin fabric of fact to fit his exaggerations and distortions.

He falsely and flagrantly accused me, for example, of writing "disinformation" based on "forged intelligence documents" and leaks from "operatives inside the government." He returned this astounding indictment without offering any evidence.

When I pointed this out, his ingenuous response was: "I must admit, he has me there." Proof? Jody has none. It was up to me, he argued, to disprove his allegations. Forged documents? He cannot cite a single one. Mysterious operatives? He has no idea who they are. Incredibly, he wants me to supply the forgeries and identify the falsifiers for him.

Then he wants the National News Council to step in. Fine. He made the accusations; he should prove them. That's an elementary principle of American justice. Let him present his evidence to any jury of editors. I await the verdict with bemusement.

A lesser impresario than Jody Powell, having unloosed accusations that he cannot possibly back up, would have retreated into silence. But Jody merely turned up the steam in his callopie.

In a subsequent accusation, he seized upon a sentence buried deep in a November, 1980, column of mine and announced that this, too, was "disinformation." It was taken, he said triumphantly, from still another "forged document." And this time, he wouldn't have to depend on me to produce the forgery. "I'll make a copy of the forged document available . . .," Jody boasted.

The incriminating sentence he cited mentioned a CIA estimate that 60 percent of the U.S. hostages in Iran would die in Carter's attempt to rescue them from Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Jody shrewdly deleted the first five words of the sentence, because these words made it clear that the information didn't come from any document, forged or otherwise. The words Jody left out described the CIA estimate as informal, and the next sentence added that other CIA analysts disagreed with the estimate.

As it happened, eight Americans died in the Iranian desert before the rescue attempt got off the ground. No one really can be sure how many would have died if the mission had not been aborted.